The Monks of Old Chester.

Four Lectures.

By the Very Rev.

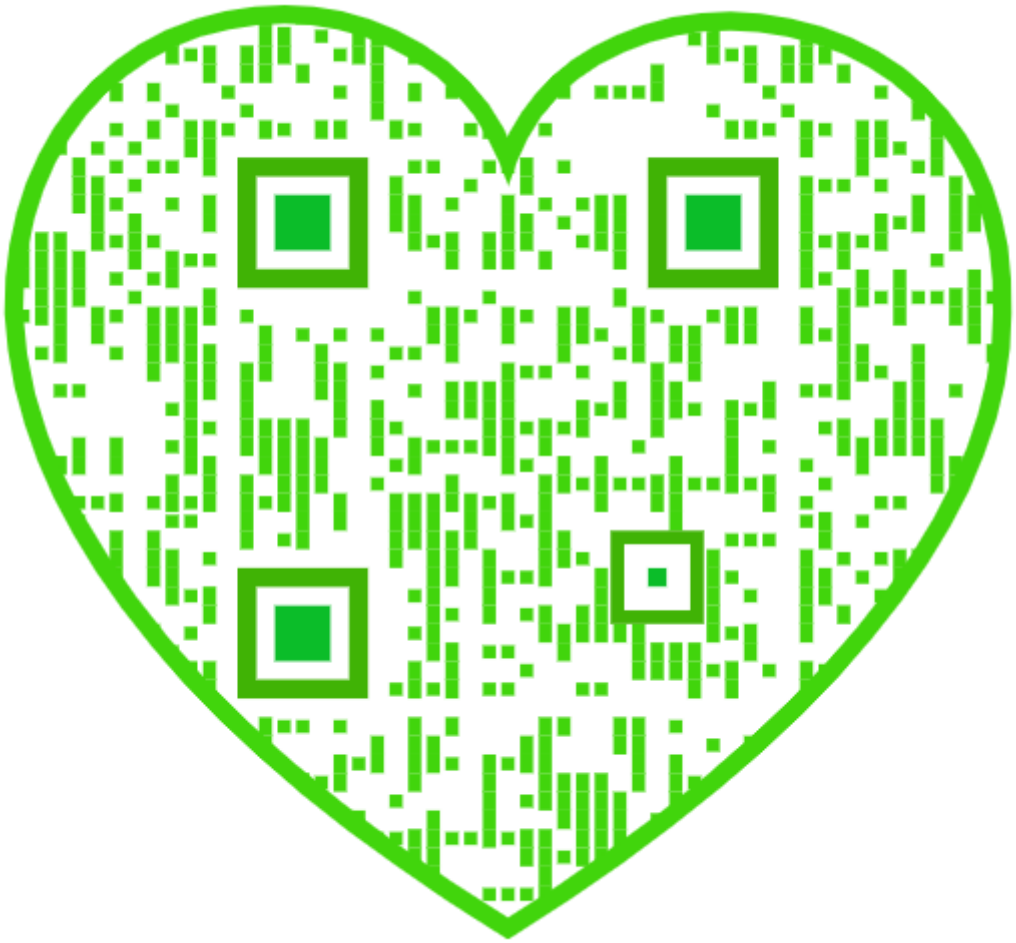
Father Rudolph, O.S.F.C.

CUM PERMISSU SUPERIORUM.

Monastery, Chester.

—

1927.



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CHESTER:

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Bishop's House,

Shrewsbury,

20*th* January, 1907.

My Dear Fr. Rudolph,

I thank you for the pleasure I have had in reading the MS. of your Four Lectures on "The Monks of Old Chester."

It was a happy thought of yours to so place an important matter like this in a popular but satisfactory and accurate way before a Chester audience.

In their printed form the words will reach a far wider audience at Chester, and, I trust, much farther afield.

They cannot but tell for the good of Religion and the truth of History.

Yours devotedly in Jesus Christ,

✠ S., Bishop of Shrewsbury.

To the Blessed Memory
of the
Monks of Old Chester,
whose hearts overflowed
with the
Love of Christ and His Poor,
the following pages
are devoutly inscribed.

PREFACE.

THE following Lectures were delivered in St. Francis' Church, Chester, on the Sunday evenings of November, 1906. The subject excited a good deal of interest. People of every shade of religious opinion thronged the Church each Sunday night. They are published by request of many Catholics and non-Catholics, who are anxious to have the story of the Monks in a simple and concise form. That they may serve to make the Monks of Old Chester more widely known and better appreciated by modern Cestrians, is the ardent desire of

THE LECTURER.

LECTURE I.

What is a Monk?

"Behold, we have left all things, and have followed thee."—
Mark, x., 28.

EVERY true-hearted Cestrian is proud of the old City. And justly so. For Chester is one of the most interesting towns in the Kingdom. Whether you look at it from an archæological, an historical, a civil, or an ecclesiastical point of view, Chester has a fascination all its own.

The Walls with their picturesque towers, and the Rows with their quaint balconies, are unique. The Castle had its infancy in Saxon times. The Cathedral with its beautiful Cloisters and Abbey ruins are to-day, as they have been in the past, "of Cestria's sires the pride." And although Chester Cathedral does not equal Canterbury, Westminster, or York, in vastness and magnificence, it certainly rivals them in antiquity, in historical incidents, and in its association with good and great, holy and noble men and women. The other pre-Reformation Churches in the City—St. Peter's, St. John's, St. Michael's, St. Mary's, and Holy Trinity—have each an interesting story of the past. They all can boast of a hoary old age, some of them a thousand years and more.

But one of the most interesting features of Old Chester is the unusually large number of Monastic establishments which existed within its walls prior to the religious upheaval of the Sixteenth Century, commonly spoken of as the Reformation. The Monasteries of Old Chester are intimately bound up with its history, and prove beyond doubt that the citizens, for well-nigh ten centuries, were not only Christian and Catholic, but that they cherished Christianity and Catholicism in their highest and best forms ; that they revered the ideal teaching of Christ; that the Counsels of the Gospel as well as its Commands were enshrined in their hearts, and constantly before their eyes in the lives of the numerous Monks, Friars, and Nuns who dwelt in the various religious houses.

It is of the Monks and Friars of Old Chester I wish to speak to you to-night and on the next three Sunday evenings. If you would rightly and fully understand the history of this ancient City you must know something of the men who contributed, in no small degree, to the making of that history. If you would rightly and fully understand the religious and social characteristics of your forefathers you must know something of the Black Monks, the Grey Friars, the White Friars, and the Black Friars. A history or description of Old Chester without the Monks would be somewhat like the play of Hamlet with the Prince of Denmark left out.

To-night I will tell you what a Monk is. Next Sunday night I will detail the daily life of a Monk, as it was lived in St. Werburgh's Abbey, St. Francis' Friary, and in the other monastic houses of the City.

The third Sunday we will consider the Monks as the saviours of religious, intellectual, and social society. And on the last Sunday we will review the downfall of the Monks, the dissolution of the Monasteries in the reign of Henry VIII.

What is a Monk? How few there are who can give an intelligent answer to this question. How many there are who can give no answer at all! The people of Chester know that there is an Abbey Gate, that there are Cloisters adjoining the Cathedral. But how many, I wonder, know what Order the Abbey Monks belonged to? They know of a "Grey Friars," a "Black Friars," a "White Friars." But what meaning do these names convey to them? If they advert to them at all, if they suggest Monks, probably people will have a hazy idea of curious men who lived long, long ago, perhaps before the flood, who were lazy, ignorant, and wicked, and who dressed in a funny way. An eminent Church of England Divine—Dr. Jessop—writes:—"There are few subjects which the great mass of Englishmen are so curiously ignorant of as the History of Monasticism, or the Constitution of the various Orders, of the fortunes of any religious house, or the discipline to which its members were, in theory at least, compelled to submit."[1] And this applies, in a measure, to Catholics as well as to Protestants. A distinguished Catholic writer tells us that he had not the slightest idea of what a Monk was until he began reading up in preparation for a celebrated work. "I knew something which approached to the idea of a saint, to that of the Church; but I had

1—"Coming of the Friars," page 16.

not the least notion of what a Monk might be, or of the Monastic Order. In all the course of my education, domestic or public, not one, even among those who were specially charged to teach me religion and history, no one considered it necessary to give me the least conception of the Religious Orders. Have we not all come forth from College knowing by heart the list of the mistresses of Jupiter, but ignorant even of the names of the founders of these Religious Orders which have civilized Europe, and so often saved the Church." Thus writes Montalembert in the introduction to the "Monks of the West."

I repeat my question:—What is a Monk? The popular idea, the notion which the man in the street has of a Monk, is gathered from pictorial advertisements, from stage plays, from novels, from writers who were strongly biassed against the principle of Monasticism, and especially from the misrepresentations circulated by those who were responsible for the dissolution of the Monasteries in the Sixteenth Century, and which have been diligently handed down to the present day. A Monk, using the word in its generally accepted meaning, is a man solemnly consecrated to Almighty God by the three vows of religion—poverty, chastity, and obedience—and living according to a Rule approved by the Church. A Monk is a Christian who puts himself apart from the world in order more surely to work out his eternal salvation. He is a man who withdraws from other men, not in hatred or contempt of them, but for the love of God and his neighbour, and to serve them so much the better as he shall have purified and regulated his own soul. The Monk accepts, not only the Precepts of the Gospel, but also binds himself to

the observance of the Counsels of Jesus Christ. To avoid what is forbidden he renounces what is permitted. To reach goodness he aspires to perfection. To make sure of his salvation he would do more than is necessary to save him. He renounces by a generous effort of his free choice, the ties of marriage and family, individual property, and personal will. And he seals his renunciation by sacred vows. Having thus triumphed over his body by continence, over his soul by obedience, over the world by poverty, he comes forth, three times a victor, to offer himself, whole and entire, to God, and to take his place in the front rank of that great army of Jesus Christ, that vast, world-wide, living, and active organization—the Roman Catholic Church.

St. John, in the second chapter and sixteenth verse of his first Epistle, reckons three great obstacles which man encounters in the uphill work of sanctifying and saving his immortal soul, viz.:—"The concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life." In plain language these three difficulties are lust, money, and self-will. Every soul that is separated from God by sin, every soul that is lost, may trace its ruin to one or other of these three causes. Control the passion of lust, restrain the greed of gold, root out selfishness and pride, and God's earth will know sin no longer, "the land that was desolate and impassable shall be glad, and the wilderness shall rejoice, and shall flourish like the lily."[1] God gives some men a keen sense, a deep knowledge of the dangers of this three-fold enemy. They become thoroughly dissatisfied with the world

1—Isaias xxxv, i.

where this triple tyrant reigns, and before whom the majority of men bow down in slavish abjection. They want to crush and kill this fiend, to be independent of him, to "walk with God and be divinely free." This is what is termed vocation, the call to the religious or monastic life. And the young man who, obeying this call, corresponding with this grace, enters a Monastery and becomes a Monk, obtains the desire of his heart. By an heroic act he vows chastity to overcome the concupiscence of the flesh, poverty to control the concupiscence of the eyes, and obedience to conquer the pride of life. To sustain the victory which he has achieved the Monk lives in a house commonly called a Monastery with other soldiers of Christ. Their life is an unworldly one; they are in the world but not of the world. Their dress, their customs, their manners, are not those of secular people. Their time is spent in one continual round of prayer, penance, study, and various works of charity. Every minute of the day is provided for, and has its special duty. A Rule, carefully drawn up by some great servant of God, and Customs which have arisen during centuries of experience, enable the Monk to economize time, and shew him how to glorify God, to sanctify his soul, and to benefit his fellow-man. The profession of the three vows, poverty, chastity, and obedience, which are the essence of the monastic state, make a Monk. The observance of the Rule makes that Monk a Franciscan, a Dominican, or a Benedictine, as the case may be.

Now various objections are raised against a man, especially a young man, becoming a Monk. People say it is an unnatural state, an impossible life. They

say it is cowardly to run away from the duties, the responsibilities, and even from the temptations of every-day life. They urge that in the Monastic system a man's energies are misdirected, that it necessarily tends to idleness, uselessness, and immorality.

I will answer all the possible objections against Monasticism by proving that it is based on the Holy Gospels; nay, more, that it is the best and holiest expression of Christianity. I will go further and prove that Jesus Christ established Monasticism, that He sowed the seed of the Religious Life in the Church which He founded, that, in practice, He lived the life of a Monk Himself. I will prove these statements from the New Testament and from Ecclesiastical writers.

Jesus Christ when he became man for love of us, and for our salvation, espoused absolute poverty, strictest chastity, and unconditional obedience, which are the foundations of the Monastic edifice. He who was rich became poor, and the poorest of the poor. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests, but the Son of Man hath nowhere to lay His head."[1] His purity was divine. Our Lord's greatest enemy never uttered a word against His angelic chastity. His obedience was perfect. "I came not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me."[2] The Evangelist tells us that Jesus went down to Nazareth and was subject to His own creatures, to Mary His Mother and Joseph His Foster-Father.[3] Thus did he mirror in His own life that perfection which He preached to the world by way of Counsel, and which is really the basis of Monasticism.

1—Matt. viii, 20. 2—John vi., 38. 3—Luke ii., 51.

St. John Chrysostom calls the Religious State "a philosphy introduced by Christ."[1] St. Bernard says "it began with the Church, nay, with Him who began the Church."[2] The distinguished theologian Suarez lays down that the "Religious Life in itself, and as regards its substance, was instituted and handed down by Jesus Christ Himself, and therefore it may be said to be of Divine Law, not by way of precept but of counsel."[3]

Jesus Christ demanded of the Apostles the observance of the Evangelical Counsels after His own example. "Come ye after me."[4] Model your lives on my life. Be poor, be chaste, be obedient. "Do not possess gold, nor silver, nor money in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, nor two coats, nor shoes, nor a staff."[5] "And they immediately followed him."[6] Hence Peter's proud boast "Behold we have left all things, and have followed thee."[7] It would appear from the fact of our Lord curing "Peter's wife's mother,"[8] that the Apostle had a wife when Jesus called him, though it is possible that he may have been a widower. However it is certain that he led a celibate life after his call to the Apostolate. Otherwise, say the holy Fathers and Commentators, he could not have said "We have left *all* things."[9] The Apostles individually had no money. Judas kept what was necessary for current expenses. And they were obedient to the voice of their Divine Master. They truly "left all things,"

1—Hom. 17, ad pop. Antioch. 2—Apolog. ad Guill. Abbat, c. x.
3—Tratatius vii., lib. 3, c. 2.
4—Matt. iv., 19. 5—Matt. x., 9. 6—Matt. iv., 20.
7—Mark x., 28. 8—Matt. viii., 14.
9—St. Jerome, Epistle 48 ad Pammachiam.

not only the pleasures of sense and "the mammon of iniquity," but also their own will to follow Christ. "Behold we have left all things and have followed thee."

You will see better the force of this declaration of Peter if you recall that it was made immediately after the interview which the rich young man had with Jesus. This young man came to our Lord and asked what he must do to be saved. Jesus answered "If thou wilt enter into life keep the Commandments." This the young man had done already, and he aspired to something more, something higher. And so he asked what else he could do. Jesus replied "If thou wilt be *perfect* go sell what thou hast and give to the poor, and come, follow Me."[1] The young man was unwilling to make this sacrifice, even for the privilege of following Christ, and he went away sad, and no wonder. Then it was that Peter exclaimed "Behold *we* have left *all* things, and have followed thee." As much as to say, we have made the sacrifice which that young man is unwilling to make, and we are proud of it, we thank God for it. Now anyone who reads the words of Jesus Christ which follow must see how strongly He pleads for men to aspire after the complete renunciation of the world and self to become Monks. He promises the richest awards to those who leave all things and follow him. "Everyone that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for my name's sake shall receive a hundred-fold, and shall possess life everlasting."[2] In the Kingdom they would be privileged to follow the

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1—Matt. xix., 16. 2—Matt. xix., 29.

Lamb whithersoever He goeth, and to sing "a new canticle before the throne" which no one else can sing,[1] and to sit with Christ and judge mankind on the last day.[2] The Fathers and Doctors of the Church see in these statements of Christ the foundations, the germs of the Monastic state; they see here every encouragement held out to those who aspire after evangelical perfection and embrace the Religious Life. "These are the words," wrote St. Bernard, "that produced in the whole world a contempt for the world; that persuaded men to voluntary poverty; that filled the Monasteries with Religious, the deserts with Anchorets; which attracted so many noble, learned, rich and talented youths to the cloisters; who, however, in leaving all things, lost nothing, because they received a hundred-fold in return."

Not only the Apostles, not only the Bishops and Priests, but the laity also tried to incorporate the Evangelical Counsels, to observe poverty, chastity and obedience in their daily lives. There was a general feeling that Christ wished *all* His followers to be, as it were, Monks and Nuns. At any rate it is certain that the fervour of the first Christians led them to aspire after the highest aspects of the Gospel teaching. We have the clearest evidence of this in the fourth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, where we read that "the multitude of believers had but one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but all things were common to them. Neither was there anyone needy among

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1—Apocalypse xiv., 3. 2—Matt. xix, 28.

them. For as many as were owners of lands and houses, sold them, and brought the price of the things they sold, and laid it down before the feet of the Apostles. And distribution was made to everyone according as he had need." And it was not until the Church had greatly increased, and the faithful began to understand that the Monastic state was not commanded but counselled, that *all* were not expected to embrace it. As St. Paul explained: "I would that all men were even as myself (a Monk); but everyone hath his proper gift from God, one after this manner and another after that . . . . But as the Lord hath distributed to everyone, as God called everyone, so let him walk."[1] From this time forward the line of demarcation between the regular and the secular life was more sharply defined. As Cassian writes: "Those who still maintained the fervour enkindled by the Apostles, and remembered what they had seen practised in their lifetime, separated from those who, whether in town or country, thought themselves allowed to lead a less austere life. These faithful imitators of the Apostles fled from the bustling city to some secluded and retired spot, to practise in private and unseen the rules which had been established for their guidance in the first period of their conversion. This was the origin of the Coenobitical life, a life separated in the spirit and the letter from the common and ordinary life in the world. Thus shut out from the rest of the faithful, these Christian men received, on account of their abstinence from marriage, and withdrawal from the conversation of men, the name of Monks. Afterwards, when they lived in com-

1—1 Cor., vii. 7.

munity they were called Coenobites. These were the earliest kind of Religious, who held the first rank both in the order of time and grace."[1]

The Religious life and the Monastic spirit grew, and became organized with the growth and organization of the Church. The grain of mustard-seed, in course of time, became a great tree; and the cream of Christianity, the best sons and daughters of the Church, built their nests thereon. As the Monks increased, it was thought wise to collect them in communities. For their own greater security, for a wider sphere of usefulness, for mutual help, encouragement and enlightenment, corporate life was advisable. "It is better that two should be together than one, for they have the advantage of their society."[2] And so, in the middle of the third century, Almighty God raised up St. Anthony, who formed the Monks in communities, and gave them a common form or rule of life. Though no longer solitaries, the word Monk continued to be used, and the word monastery to denote the house where the Monks lived. The four great founders of Monastic or Religious Rules were St. Basil, St. Augustine, St. Benedict, and St. Francis. These are styled the Patriarchs of Monks.

The sons of St. Benedict and the sons of St. Francis flourished in Chester for many a century. The Benedictine Abbey adjoined the present Cathedral, which was the Abbey Church. The Franciscan Monastery stood on the sites of the Linenhall and Stanley Place, and touched Watergate Street on the south and the Walls on the west. There were also Dominican and Carmelite Monasteries. The former

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1—Conference xvii., chap. v. 2—Ecclesiastes iv., 9.

was located between Nicholas Street (formerly called Black Friars Lane) and the Walls, and was bounded on the north by Watergate Street. The latter Order was located between White Friars and Commonhall Street, and Weaver Street on the west and Bridge Street on the East. The Benedictines were called the "Black Monks" to distinguish them from other ancient Monks who wore white habits. The Franciscans were commonly known in Chester, and in England generally, as the "Grey Friars," their habit-cloth not being dyed brown but the natural colour of the wool. The Dominicans were called the "Black Friars," from the black scapular they wore over their white habit. And the Carmelites were named the "White Friars" on account of their large white choir cloak. These were the popular names by which the people distinguished one Order from another. In the next discourse I shall have an opportunity of explaining the distinction between a Monk and a Friar, when we come to speak of the daily life and labours of the Monks. This will bring us more closely in contact with the Monks of Old Chester.

Now that we have seen what a Monk really is it is easy to understand how the inhabitants of old Chester who were all Catholics, and, of course, Roman Catholics, (there was no other religion in England up to the sixteenth century) and who had the true idea of a Monk, how they revered and loved these men who so closely followed in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. They looked upon them as "the salt of the earth and the light of the world," and were always glad when they saw the Grey,

White, and Black habits moving about the town, bringing sunshine and blessing to all with whom they came in contact.

I see in vision this moment the Monks of old Chester as your fathers saw them in the flesh, men of noble mien, men of unworldly lives, men of sanctity, men of learning, men who spent their days in praising God, and in serving the people. It is a vision beautiful. My soul goes out in admiration of these angels in human form. I pay them my heart's homage. Holy Monks of old Chester, noble imitators of Christ, worthy sons of Benedict, Francis, Dominic, and Carmel, I salute you in the name of this vast congregation. Your memories are not in oblivion in Chester. The very walls of the City perpetuate your names. As long as Chester is Chester, Grey, Black, and White Friars will be familiar words, for "Monks, like oaks, are immortal."

LECTURE II.

Daily Life of a Monk.

"And they rested not day and night saying: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, and who is, and who is to come."—Apocalypse iv., 8.

WE shall better understand what a Monk is, we shall have a more intimate knowledge of the excellence of Monasticism, we shall make closer and more appreciable acquaintance with the Monks of Old Chester by considering the daily life of a Monk as lived in this city from the eleventh to the sixteenth Century. I will open wide the doors of St. Werburgh's Abbey and of St. Francis' Friary, and in opening these I shall be opening the doors of the Black and White Friars, and shew you every nook and corner, and tell you all about the Monks and Friars. Keep your eyes open and watch them at their daily duties and you will see how absurd, and how absolutely false, is the charge of laziness and uselessness so often made against the Monks. You will see, and I shall trust to your honour and veracity to admit, that there is no life on earth so busy, so beautiful, so blessed, as the life of a Monk. It is indeed, as far as possible a copy of the lives

of the Blessed in heaven, who, as the Evangelist tells us, are continually praising God. "And they rested not day and night, saying: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, and who is, and who is to come."

Before we start on our pious pilgrimage I had better explain the difference between a Monk and a Friar. It will help you to a better understanding of their respective lives and occupations. Up to the early part of the thirteenth Century all "Religious" were known as Monks. Then St. Francis and St. Dominic introduced a new spirit into Monasticism and their followers became known as Friars. In old Chester there were Monks and Friars. The Monks were the Benedictines. The Friars were the Franciscans, the Dominicans and the Carmelites, popularly known as the Grey, Black, and White Friars. Though the name Monk is generally applied to all men who profess poverty, chastity, and obedience, and live in a religious house, and according to an approved Rule, yet there is an important difference between a Monk and a Friar. The Monk lives in far greater seclusion from the world than the Friar. The Monk seldom leaves his cloister. The chief work of the Monks is singing the praises of God in their beautiful Abbey Churches. When not engaged in the Church the Monk wrote and translated books, cultivated the fine arts, taught in schools, and engaged in agriculture. Strictly speaking, the Monk was not supposed to concern himself at all with the outside world, at least not directly. He lived in a world of his own, or, rather, in the words of Sacred Scripture, he was dead and his life was hid with Christ in God. And although a Monastery became, invariably, a centre of civiliza-

tion and enlightenment, from which radiated light, warmth, and untold blessings to the outside world, these results flowed from a growth and development which the founders probably never contemplated, and which they certainly did not set forth as the end to be aimed at.

Now the Friars were the antithesis of this. Their chief work, after their own sanctification, was outside the Monastery, among the people, preaching the Gospel, explaining and defending the truths of Christianity, winning poor sinners back to the Saviour, caring for the souls and bodies of the human race. Hence they did not build, nor did they require large Monasteries or Churches. The number of Friars in a Community would scarcely average twenty. They had no need, and no ambition for extensive lands and possessions. They were not permanently fixed in any one Monastery. A Friar would be stationed in Chester to-day, and to-morrow transferred to Coventry, Oxford, York, Paris, or Rome. The following week he might be sailing with some Christopher Columbus over the wild ocean, to preach Christ and Him Crucified to the inhabitants of a newly-discovered land. In a word, the Monks served God directly. They were the King's Courtiers. The Friars served Him in His creatures, in the sinful, the sorrowful, the down-cast, and the down-trodden. They served God in healing the wounded heart, in calming the troubled spirit of poor, wayward humanity. There was practically no limit to the labours of the Friar. He was prepared for any and every work of charity. With his Master he could say "The spirit of the Lord is upon me. Wherefore he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor, he hath sent me

to heal the contrite of heart, to preach deliverance to the captives, and give sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of reward."[1] And this is why the Friars, in Chester and elsewhere, were more popular than the Monks. The people knew them more intimately, and saw more of their apostolic work.

With this distinction in your minds you will get a clearer idea of the lives and labours of the Monks and Friars of old Chester. Now I want to carry you back, in spirit, four hundred years. I want you to imagine that we are, at this moment, at St. Francis' Friary — the Monastery of the Grey Friars which stands on the site of the present Linenhall. The hour is close on midnight. I have arranged with the porter so there will be no difficulty in gaining admission. We are walking along the silent cloister. Hark! What is that grating noise you hear? Do not be alarmed. It is the wooden rattle arousing the Friars from their peaceful slumbers. If you listen you will hear a gentle tap at each door—every Friar has his own sleeping chamber or cell; the Monks usually slept in dormitories. The caller says "Benedicamus Domino"—Let us bless the Lord. The Friar within answers "Deo Gratias" — Thanks be to God — and immediately turns out of bed. There are occasions when the poor tired Friar would be much more thankful if the caller overslept himself. But this does not often happen. You hear the clattering of sandals hurrying along the cloister, and so we will step into Church out of their way. The Church was always the centre of attraction in a Monastery. It towered

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1—Luke iv., 18.

over all the other buildings, and exceeded them all in magnificence and in costliness. The Monks loved the beauty of God's house and the place where His glory dwelleth. The poorest Monastery endeavoured to have a rich Church. The rich Monasteries could not be too lavish in adorning the Temple of the Most High. You know what a grand, noble pile St. Werburgh's Abbey Church—the present Cathedral—is. You see visitors gazing at it in wonder and admiration. It is an architectural dream, a thing of beauty, a joy for ever. And it is consoling to know that the Cathedral authorities, though not of the ancient faith, love the old Abbey Church and keep it in a splendid state of preservation. St. Francis' is less imposing than St. Werburgh's, but withal a fine, devotional Church, and boasts of a nicely tapering spire.

The first object that attracts our attention in the Church is the rood loft with the image of our Saviour dying "for us men and for our salvation." On either side stands His Blessed Mother and the Beloved Disciple. Jesus crucified is constantly before the eyes of a Catholic. In the Chancel is the High Altar, and suspended from the roof you see the sanctuary lamp burning to denote the Divine Presence and the burning love of the Heart of Jesus in the Tabernacle. The pulpit stands out in the midst of the congregation, and the confessionals are unobtrusively in recesses around the Church. You are surprised to see a few of the townspeople in the Church at this hour of the night. They are lay Franciscans, some of them leading men in the City, and they regularly assist at Matins.

It is now on the stroke of midnight, and the

bell rings out from the tower; the bells at the Abbey Church chime in; and the bells of the White and Black Friars join in the harmony. If we could only hear them, the bells of heaven are also ringing at this moment summoning the Angelic Choirs to join with the Choirs in the Monasteries of old Chester in chanting the praises of God. The bells are heard throughout the City. The sound travels over the Roodee, and echoes on the green, sloping banks on the other side of the river. It reaches Handbridge, and finally dies away in the quiet, peaceable country. When town and country are wrapt in slumber, the Monks, true soldiers of the Cross, are on the battlements fighting the enemy. When the citizens of Chester are seeking rest after their day's toil, these servants of Christ are praising their Maker, and praying for poor sinners. And what consolation the thought of this brings to many a sleepless sufferer. When Philip Augustus, on his way to the Holy Land, was bestormed on the Sicilian Seas, and those on board thought their last moment had come, suddenly the sound of a Monastery bell floated over the waters. Philip on hearing it immediately restored confidence by telling the crew and passengers that it was now the hour of midnight, and that the Monks were praying for them, and that God would surely save them from peril.

One of the priests begins the Divine Office saying: "Thou shalt open my lips, O Lord," at the same time making the sign of the Cross on his lips. The others answer: "And my tongue shall declare thy praise." "O God come to my aid." "O Lord make haste to help me." "Glory be to the Father,

and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost," during which all bow profoundly. "As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end, Amen." Two Acolytes standing in the middle of the Choir before the great psalter cry out "Venite Adoremus," Come let us fall down and adore the God that made us. And so for a full hour they chant the praises of God, singing nine, and sometimes more, of the grand Psalms of David, reading three lessons from Sacred Scripture, a short life of the Saint of the day, a commentary on the holy Gospel, followed by the Te Deum and Laudes, and concluding with one or more of those wondrous prayers or collects which in a few words express the most sublime aspirations and petitions. The Monks depart from the Church and return to their cells for a few hours repose.

At 5-30 they are summoned to rise, and after their morning ablutions, immediately repair to the Church. The Litanies are recited, and half-an-hour's Meditation is made on some aspect of our Saviour's life or death. Prime and Terce are sung, and at 7-0 the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the central act of Christian worship, is offered. A great number of the citizens are present at the Conventual Mass. In the old Catholic days nearly every man and woman in Chester was present at daily Mass. Breakfast follows the Conventual Mass, and then each Monk goes to his special duties.

There are two distinct bodies of Monks in every Monastery, to which I must call your attention, that you may the better understand their various duties. There are Monks who are ecclesiastics, who are in Holy Orders, priests just the same as any

other priests in the Church, but professing a higher and more perfect state of life. Monks who are priests are called "Regulars," because they order their lives by a fixed rule. Other priests are called "Seculars," not that they are worldly men, but because the disposal of their time and their manner of living are left, more or less, to their own discretion. In the Monastery there are also lay Monks. These are called in ecclesiastical language "Conversi," the converted, because in former times men who had led worldly lives (not necessarily wicked lives) and followed worldly avocations, turned from the world and entered the Cloister. We have an example of this in Hugh Lupus, Earl of Chester. He ended his days as a lay Monk in St. Werburgh's Abbey. Now-a-days the lay-brothers, as they are commonly called, enter at a comparatively early age, and either through humility, want of vocation, or insufficient education, do not study for the priesthood. As Denis Florence McCarthy sings of the renowned Brother Michael O'Cleary, the Franciscan Annalist of Ireland, and the chief of the "Four Masters":—

> "Less than Priest, and more than layman,
> On the threshold of the Chancel
> He is well content to hover."

St. Francis was only a deacon, and, through his profound humility, would not allow himself to be promoted to the priesthood. The same is said of St. Benedict. Princes, and nobles innumerable, have felt honoured in wearing the religious habit as lay-Monks, and in performing the manual work of the Monastery. Their motto was that of the Psalmist: "I have chosen to be an abject in the house of my God, rather than to dwell in the tabernacles of sinners."[1]

1—Psalm lxxxiii., 11.

A great Pope exclaimed when dying: "Would to God I had been a lay-brother in a Monastery rather than Vicar of Christ or Bishop of Rome."[1]

We shall now go around and see the Monks busy at their various employments. We shall first of all spend a little time at the Abbey, beginning in the Cloisters. You see the priests sitting at desks, two or three in each bay facing the garth. That Monk you see in the bay opposite the entrance to the Chapter House is Ralph Higden. He is writing one of the Mystery Plays which is to be acted next Whitsun. His neighbour is looking up some old documents about Chester before the Coming of the Romans. And the Monk at this side is illuminating a new Missal which is to be used, for the first time, on the Feast of St. Werburgh. That Monk in the next bay who is kneeling at his desk is making a copy of the Holy Bible. Out of respect for the word of God he kneels while engaged in this sacred work.

In those Cloisters not a sound is heard. The Monks work in silence, and if obliged to speak they do so in a whisper. There being no idle gossip the Monks are able to get through a vast amount of work. In that room which we are now passing, a couple of Monks are teaching some boys and young men from the town to read and write, and the elements of grammar, and also the Latin language. In the next room the choir-master is giving lessons on Gregorian Chant to a number of young Monks. We shall not intrude on the Abbot and the Prior as they are entertaining the Abbot of St. Albans and the Prior of Coventry who have come to Chester on a Royal Commission.

1—Honorius iii.

Coming back to St. Francis' we find some of the priests in the library preparing their sermons. That Father you saw passing out as we entered is going to Eastgate Street to make peace between two members of the Guild of Tanners who have quarrelled over the character of Lucifer in the Mystery Play which they are rehearsing. One imagines he would make a better devil than the other, and so the Friar has to go and put matters right. Another Father has gone to look up a butcher who is spending too much time at the "Bear and Billet" and neglecting his business. A third hastens to the bedside of a dying citizen in Lower Bridge Street to comfort and console him and his family in their affliction.

We shall now take a glance at the lay-Monks in their several departments. No women are allowed inside the "enclosure" of a Monastery. The lay-brothers do all the manual work, and do it with cheerful devotion after the example of their Divine Model who worked with Joseph in the carpenter's shop. This is the kitchen, a very necessary department of the Monastery, for the Monks, spiritual as they are, cannot live, and work, and pray, on air. The Brother Cook is admiring a nice Dee salmon which has been sent to the Friars by their friend Roger Potter, Mayor of Chester. The Brother Porter is helping the poor, and some travellers, to bread, soup, and an occasional mug of home-brewed beer. The Sacristan is busy in the Church putting away the sacred Vestments. In the tailor's shop a couple of Brothers are making and mending habits, and in the next shop you see the shoemaker adjusting straps on a sandal. Three or four Brothers are working away in the kitchen garden, for the Monks use a

good deal of vegetables. In the carpenter's shop the Brother carpenter is carving a canopy for the new statue of Our Lady which has been placed in a corner of the Church. The Monastery is a regular beehive, and every Monk is busy making honey, some spiritual, some material honey, and all working for the greater glory of God.

While on our rounds we must visit the Infirmary and the Novitiate. In the former are a couple of sick Friars, carefully and devoutly attended to by the Brother Infirmarian, a Friar noted for his tender charity, and for his skill, having studied medicine before entering the Order. In a Monastery every possible care is taken of sick and aged Monks. St. Francis laid down in his Rule that when "a Friar was sick the others should tend him as they would wish to be tended themselves." In the Novitiate are the young men who have lately joined the Order. They are being taught the science of the saints, and the meaning and spirit of the Rule and the Vows, to the observance of which they hope soon to bind themselves for life. Up to the time of their "profession" they are perfectly free to leave if they choose. And the Order may send them away if it is thought they are not suitable subjects. No one is forced into a Monastery, and no one is compelled to remain there. No one is kept unless it is clear that he is called by Jesus Christ, and that he is willing to follow his Saviour in poverty, chastity, and obedience, and in a life of usefulness according to the spirit of the Order which he has entered. That elderly ecclesiastic you see speaking to the novice-master is a secular priest who

feels a call to the higher life of Monasticism, and is seeking advice about his vocation.

It is now about 11-30 a.m., and the Monks who are ecclesiastics go the Church to chant "Sext" and "None." After that, about noon, the dinner-bell rings, and all assemble in the refectory. They sing the beautiful old-world grace beginning with the words of the Psalmist: "The eyes of all wait upon Thee, O Lord, and Thou givest them meat in due season. Thou openest Thy hand, and fillest with blessing every living creature."[1] They then take their places at the tables according to seniority in religion. A good, plain, substantial meal is served. Very often the midday meal is the first and last full meal of the day. The Monks fast a good deal, and in some Orders flesh meat is never used. Like St, Paul the Monks keep their bodies in subjection lest while they preach to others they themselves may become castaways.[2]

During the dinner one of the Monks reads, first a chapter of the Holy Bible, and then some spiritual book, the life of a Saint, or the history of the Church. You will see in the ruined refectory of St. Werburgh's the pulpit where the reader fed the minds of the Monks while they nourished their bodies, acting on the Gospel principle that "not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God."[3] In front of the Reader's pulpit, in some Monasteries, was inscribed the words "Cibus Cibo Melior"—a nourishment better than food.

After dinner there is an hour's free time, and

1—Psalm cxliv, 15 & 16. 2—1 Cor. ix, 27. 3—Matt. iv., 4.

then the Monks repair to the Church to sing Vespers. The afternoon is occupied pretty much the same as the forenoon. At 6-o Compline is chanted, followed by Meditation. And at 7-o the evening collation is partaken, after which there is free time and recreation. And here you see "angelic hilarity combined with Monastic simplicity." Here you can see how truly happy a Monk is. Here you can see that true religion does not make men morose. Here you see how it is possible to be good, to serve God, to live a life of penance, and at the same time to be as light-hearted and as joyful as a lark on a bright Spring morning.

Look at the zest with which that grey-bearded Friar plays a game of bowls with a religious not half his age. The others watch the progress of the game with such intense interest that you would think they had sovereigns staked on the result. If the truth were known perhaps they have little innocent bets of Pater Nosters and Ave Marias. Just as the game is growing very exciting the silence bell rings, the recreation time having expired, and each one hurries off to his cell. After asking God's pardon for any faults of the day, and commending his soul to Jesus, the Monk is soon sleeping the sleep of the just until the midnight rattle summons him once again to the Church to join with the holy angels in chanting the praises of God.

Such is the daily life of a Monk and a Friar. Such was the life they lived in old Chester for hundreds of years. And tell me, do you think is was a lazy life, a useless life, a wicked life? If you were not in the Church I believe you would shout out such an emphatic NO as would make the slanderers

of Monks hide their heads in shame. An idle life! An idle life when every hour and minute of the day is usefully occupied. The Monk's time is God's time, and therefore it is sacred, it is more precious than gold, and the Monk would not waste a moment of it. Lazy Monks! you hear people say, people who know nothing about them. Lazy Monks who rise at midnight to praise God and pray for the world, and who rise again early in the morning, and work almost unceasingly all day. Why, it might be said of the Monks, as is said of the Blessed in heaven: "And they rested not day or night saying: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, and who is, and who is to come." The daily life of the Monks of old Chester was an angelic life, a life of closest union with God, a life of almost continual prayer, a life of self-denial, a life of honourable labour, a life, as we shall see more fully in next Sunday's discourse, productive of untold blessings to the Church, to the world, to religion, and to society.

Is it any wonder the citizens of Chester loved the Monks? "The Friars were continually receiving bequests and legacies in wills from persons who held them in great respect for their austere and devout lives," writes Dr. Morris.[1] They flocked from all parts of the city to the Churches of the Monks and Friars for Divine Service. They went to them to be shriven, to receive the Bread of Life, to hear the Word of God. They went to the Monk and the Friar for counsel in their difficulties, knowing that they were not only learned and experienced, but also sympathetic and warm-hearted. "Weep with

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1—History of Chester, p. 143.

the unhappy," said Columba to his Monks, and it is a command they always carried out. The Monk, in the words of Shakespeare,

> **Hath a tear for pity, and a hand**
> **Open as day for melting charity.**

The people of Chester knew the Monk; they knew his daily life; they knew that he rested not day or night imploring the mercy and blessing of heaven, not only for himself, but also for them, for their children, and for their city. And so their natural and supernatural instincts drew out their deepest affection for the Monks and Friars. The great Lacordaire, addressing Monasteries where the Monks lead such beautiful, and such useful lives, exclaims, "O dear and holy houses! Many august palaces have been built on earth, many magnificent mausoleums have been raised, but art and the human heart have never gone farther than in the creation of a Monastery."[1]

1—Life of St. Dominic, chap. viii.

LECTURE III.

Monks the Saviours of Society.

"I have set thee to be the light of the Gentiles; that thou mayest be for salvation unto the utmost parts of the earth."—Acts xiii., 47.

IN this lecture I shall have the pleasure of opening one of the grandest pages in the world's history, whether ecclesiastical or secular, and shewing you the Monks as the great Apostles of Christianity, and as the civilizers and saviours of human society. I shall shew you how much the people of Chester, and of the world generally, are indebted to the Monks of old. The theme is a magnificent one. The difficulty in dealing with it is to compress such a vast subject into a single discourse. For the sake of brevity and clearness I will simply touch, firstly, on the Monks as apostles of the faith of Jesus Christ; secondly, as the patrons and promoters of learning; thirdly, as the saviours of social society, and especially as the friends and protectors of the poor. "I have set thee to be the light of the Gentiles; that thou mayest be

for salvation unto the utmost parts of the earth." This is the commission which God gives the Monk, to be the saviour of religious, intellectual, and social society.

It must be evident to anyone who knows what a Monk is, to anyone who has a knowledge of the daily life of a Monk, that no man is better qualified, no man more adapted for carrying on the work of Christ, for spreading God's Kingdom, for promoting the sanctification and salvation of souls, than a priest who is a Monk. And history bears witness that no one has worked harder in the vineyard of the Lord, and no one has been more successful than the Monk-priest. It stands to reason that men who have renounced all that is nearest and dearest for love of Christ, men who have consecrated their lives to God and humanity, men who have disciplined their bodies and their souls by poverty, chastity, and obedience, men who could say with St. Peter: "Behold, Lord, we have left all things and have followed thee," that such men are pre-eminently fitted for the Apostolic ministry, that such men will make any sacrifice for the souls which the Blessed Jesus died to save. The Monk takes literally, and as addressed to himself in a special manner, the command of Christ: "preach the Gospel to every creature." Hence you find him traversing kingdoms and continents, crossing seas and oceans, penetrating virgin forests, toiling over the burning sands of deserts, enduring the hardships, the cold and heat of arctic, antartic, and tropic regions, seeking everywhere the lost sheep, and bringing him home to the Divine Sheepfold, to the loving and adorable Heart of Jesus.

Who have been the Missionaries of the Gospel from the days of the Apostles to the present time? The Monks. Who have converted the nations of the earth? The Monks. Take, for example, the conversion of England in the sixth century. Who planted the Cross of Jesus Christ on Anglo-Saxon soil? The Monks. You know the pretty story of the Monk Gregory passing through the Roman market and seeing a group of fair-haired boys being sold as slaves. His kindly heart went out to the little strangers, and he inquired who they were and whence they came. Being told they were Angles from Deira—the north-eastern part of England—he cried out, playing on the words: "non sunt angli sed angeli"—they are not Angles but angels—and they must be delivered "de ira Dei"—from the anger of God. Being unable to come himself he sent the Monk Augustine and forty companions to preach the Gospel to the Anglo-Saxon nation. They landed at Ebbsfleet in Kent, and in a short time converted King Ethelbert and his people, and Augustine became the first Archbishop of Canterbury. Another body of Monks, the famous and intrepid sons of St. Columbkille, came from the great Monastery of Iona and converted the people of the north to the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ and His Holy Catholic Church. It is, of course, well known that the Gospel was preached in Britain long before the time of St. Augustine and St. Columbkille. But it is also certain that when the pagan Saxons gained the mastery of the country they banished the natives to Wales, Cornwall and Brittany, and with the Britons went almost every vestige of Christianity. So that Augustine and Paulinus, Columbkille, Aidan, and Colman, had a purely pagan land to conquer.

During the next few centuries we find Monks like St. Columbanus, St. Gall, St. Boniface, and St. Willibrord carrying the torch of Divine Truth all over the Continent of Europe, and, as is said of St. Brendan, even to America.

With the advent of the Friars in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a new impetus was given to missionary zeal, and to the spread of the Kingdom of God. The new spirit infused by St. Francis and St. Dominic into Monasticism made their followers in a special manner "to be the light of the Gentiles," and the bearers of "salvation unto the utmost parts of the earth." St. Francis himself went to Egypt to preach Jesus Christ to the Sultan and to his Mahommedan subjects. And it is simply amazing, considering the hardships and perils of travelling, and the tedious methods of locomotion eight or ten hundred years ago, to find how quickly the Monks and Friars penetrated the most remote regions. Impelled by the wondrous power of Divine love, which is stronger than death, the Franciscans in a few years had penetrated Greece, Bulgaria, Armenia, Tartary, India, China, Tibet, and other distant and almost unknown lands. We find them by the hundred and the thousand shedding their blood for the Christian faith in various Eastern climes. When the Crusaders abandoned Palestine, and, owing to their miserable jealousies and squabbles, left the Holy Places in the hands of the infidel, the sons of St. Francis remained, and they are there to this day. Two thousand of these brave soldiers of Christ were martyred, and it is said that six thousand of them died afterwards during the great plague.[1]

1—"Lives of the Blessed of the Three Orders." vol. iv., p. 198.

While thousands of Monks were preaching the Gospel in heathen lands, tens of thousands were actively engaged in fostering faith and devotion in the cities and towns of every country in Europe. "The Friars were the evangelizers of the towns in England for three hundred years," writes the Anglican divine, Dr. Jessop,[1] They left nothing undone, no stone unturned, in the winning of souls to Christ. "Give us souls; take everything else," was the impassioned cry of their hearts. They established Confraternities, Guilds, Sodalities of every kind to encourage the people, to draw them as with silken cords into the way of virtue, along the path of perfection. The Monks of Chester, Coventry and York wrote the Mystery and the Miracle Plays in order to bring home to the people in a pleasing and impressive manner the blessed truths of the Gospel, and the beautiful stories of the Old Testament. At first they themselves performed these plays in the Churches, and then they taught the various Guilds to act them in the streets for the thousands of people who came from far and near to witness them. And this is why in the old Catholic days, before the invention of the printing-press, when books were scarce, and when comparatively few could read, the people were well versed in the Bible and in Christian doctrine. They had a deeper knowledge of the God who made them and the Christ who saved them than the mass of the people have to-day. When the Monks had full sway, every man, woman and child was taught to know and love God, and to fulfil the end of their existence.

As a final proof of the important part played by

1—"Coming of the Friars," p. 49.

the Monks of old in the Church of God, I would draw your attention to the fact that nearly every prominent position in the Church was occupied by them. Not that they sought honours, not that they wished for high places. They shunned them when possible, and accepted them only because it was for the good of religion. Fully seventy Popes were Monks. The Religious Orders have given innumerable bishops to the Church. In the 12th century, out of the seventeen bishoprics in England, eight were occupied by Monks.[1] The Franciscans alone have had two thousand bishops, over five hundred archbishops, sixty cardinals, and five Popes. They have given archbishops to Canterbury, and at least ninety bishops to Ireland.[2] Well might Dr. Faber say that "Monastic Orders are the very life-blood of the Church, monuments of true Apostolic Christianity, the refuges of spirituality in the worst times, the nurses of heroic bishops, the mothers of rough-handed and great-hearted missionaries. A Church without Monasteries is a body with its right arm paralyzed."[3] And Dean Farrar, in his "Saintly Workers," writes: "For many a long century the very bulwarks and ramparts of the Church were the Monasteries; and the one invisible force of the Church lay in the self-sacrifice, the holiness, the courage of the Monks."[4] And Pius IX. called the Monks "the chosen phalanxes of the Army of Christ, which has always been the bulwark and ornament of the Christian republic."[5]

The same spirit which animated the Monks in

1—"Ancienne et Nouvelle Discipline de l'Eglise," Tome II., p. 577.

2—"History of the Three Orders," vol. iv., p. 200.

3—"Life of St. Wilfrid." 4—Page 82. 5—Encyclical, June 6, 1847.

the spread of religion—love of Christ and love of the souls which He died to save—urged them also in the promotion of learning. The Monks knew that all true science, all real wisdom comes from God, and must inevitably lead to Him. Hence they loved learning, and they loved to impart knowledge to others. Like St. Bede, of Jarrow, they were always delighted "to learn, to teach, to write." Dr. Jessop tells us that in those old times "an ignorant Monk was certainly a rarity, an absolutely unlettered or uneducated one an impossibility."[1] Study was an important daily duty for every Monk who was an ecclesiastic. He knew that Divine and human knowledge was a necessary equipment of a minister of the Gospel. Did not the inspired writer say: "The lips of the priest shall keep wisdom, and they shall seek the law at his mouth."[2] We saw in the last lecture the Monks at St. Werburgh's and St. Francis' studying in their cloisters and libraries. We saw Ralph Higden writing the Mystery Plays. He also wrote a work called the Polychronicon, which is a history of the world from the beginning to his own time. Another Monk, Henry Bradshaw, a native of Chester, published a metrical life of St. Werburgh, and wrote a book on the "Antiquity and Greatness of the City of Chester." In almost every Monastery there was a special room, or cloister, called the "Scriptorium," where the Holy Bible and other important works were copied. It was thus that hundreds of copies of the Bible were spread throughout the world before the art of printing was invented. And it is a remarkable fact that the first printing presses in England, as well as on the Continent,

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1—"Coming of the Friars," p. 161.
2—Malachias, ii., 7.

were set up in Monasteries.[1] The Monks gladly welcomed the new and speedier means of diffusing learning and multiplying works. It is a fact that for hundreds of years the noblest intellects in Christendom were Monks. I need only mention the names of a few literary giants like St. Augustine, St. Basil, St. Bede (the father of English history), St. Bernard, St. Thomas (the angelic doctor), St. Bonaventure (the Seraphic doctor), Duns Scotus (the subtle doctor), Roger Bacon (the pioneer of natural science), Albert the Great, Alexander of Hales, Cardinal Ximenes (who published the first polyglot Bible), Bro. Michael O'Cleary (the Chief of the Four Masters), Father Luke Wadding (the historian), and scores and hundreds of other Monks who were prodigies of learning not surpassed in any age.

The Monks were not only learned themselves but they did everything in their power to impart knowledge to others. In olden times Monastery and school were synonymous terms. Every Monastery was a school, and every school was a Monastery. The Monks gave the poorest boy as well as the richest an opportunity of receiving a good education. Dean Farrar has a striking passage on the educational facilities which the Monks afforded the poor. "Consider" he says "what the Church did for education. Her ten thousand Monasteries kept alive and transmitted that torch of learning which would otherwise have been extinguished long before. A religious education incomparably superior to the mere athleticism of the nobles' hall was extended to the meanest serf who asked for it."[2] There was

1—Gasquet's Henry VIII. and the English Monasteries, Introd. xxxi.
2—"Christianity and the Race." Lecture v., p. 186.

scarcely a Chair in any of the Universities of Europe which was not occupied by Monks. They practically made the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Nearly every Order was represented at one or the other, and some at both. The late Mr. Gladstone in his Romanes lecture at Oxford shortly before his death said: "The Franciscan Order gave to Oxford the larger number of those remarkable and even epoch-making men who secured for the University such a career of glory in mediæval times."[1] The Franciscans had sixty-seven professors at Oxford, and seventy-three at Cambridge. In these good old days when the Monks flourished at Chester and throughout the country, nearly every work on theology and philosophy, every commentary on Sacred Scripture, every book on the spiritual life, emanated from the Monasteries.

Well might a distinguished modern Benedictine say that "the intellectual hinges of the Universal Church (speaking humanly) have been Monastic men, that is to say, men who, through an intense Cross—worship, and a keen perception of the beautiful, threw up all for Christ, and through

> 'The ingrained instinct of old reverence,
> The holy habit of obediency,'

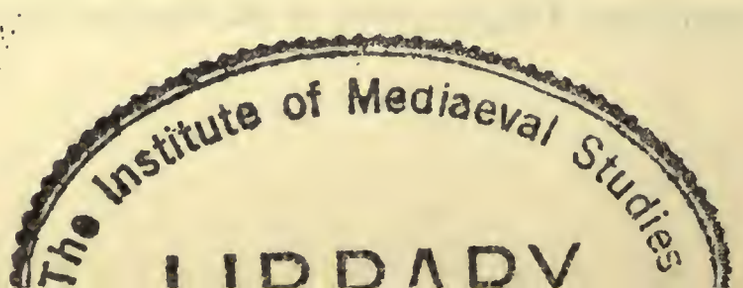
lived, laboured, suffered for Him, and died into His arms."[2]

And now I come to my last point, and though last not least, the Monks as the saviours of social society, and the special friends and defenders of the poor. "I have set thee to be the light of the Gentiles;

1—p. 12.

2—Archbishop Vaughan, Life of St. Thomas, vol. ii., p. 523.

that thou mayest be for salvation (social as well as spiritual and literary salvation) unto the utmost parts of the earth." When the Church emerged from the Catacombs, after three hundred years of fierce persecution, she found the glory of the Roman Empire fading away. Its former civilization and virility had given place to grossness and effeminacy. Moral corruption and unbridled licentiousness reigned supreme. As a consequence of the national demoralization the people were oppressed and enslaved. The Emperors, though now nominally Christian, soon became greater obstacles to religion and piety than their pagan predecessors. Julian "the Apostate" stripped the Church of every privilege. He re-opened and re-built the deserted pagan temples, and attempted to re-build the temple of Jerusalem. Writers and preachers of the period draw terrible pictures of the worse than barbarous state of society. The mass of the people were crushed to the earth by a few tyrannous and profligate officials. Excessive taxation was strangling the nation. The historian Zosimus, to give an idea to what extremes the people were driven, relates that fathers prostituted their daughters to have means to pay the tax. Those who could not pay were imprisoned, scourged, their wives scourged, and their children sold as slaves. Moral and material ruin were visible everywhere. The Church, though having many saintly and intrepid rulers, truly Apostolic bishops such as Athanasius, Augustine, Ambrose, and Chrysostom, seemed powerless to stem the plague. When these faithful followers of Christ raised their voices in defence of the Church or the people they were speedily imprisoned or exiled. And the sheep without the shepherds were worse off than ever.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"Two things were necessary to save society, a new element in the world, and a new force in the Church."[1] Two invasions were required — that of the Barbarians from the north, that of the Monks from the south. The Barbarians were necessary to conquer the Romans, and the Monks to conquer the Barbarians. They both came in the designs of Providence, and accomplished their respective Missions.

The Goths and the Visigoths, from the banks of the Danube, led on by Alaric, who heard a voice crying to him: "Go and destroy Rome," and afterwards the Huns and the Ostrogoths, from the interior of Tartary, led on by Attila, "the scourge of God," as he was called, overran Europe and swept away the Roman Empire. And then came the Monks, the glorious sons of St. Benedict, and converted and civilized the Barbarians, restored peace to the nations, and saved society.

How did the Monks effect this wondrous change? How did they succeed in turning the swords of the fierce, wild northeners into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks? By the teaching of Jesus Christ, by the power of the Gospel, by the natural influence of Monastic life. The Monks in a short time were spread all over Europe. They stood before the new race of men the embodiment of everything holy, kind, and good. They were an object-lesson in religion and refinement, in mechanical skill and industry, which appealed with irresistible force to the rude nations which had arisen from the ashes of the Empire. Their motto was *pax*—peace. Their Monasteries were

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1—Montalembert, "Monks of the West." vol. i., bk. 1.

little Kingdoms where justice, charity, law, order, prayer, and labour reigned. In them the Divine Majesty was duly worshipped, and Humanity also received its due measure of reverence. There every man was "free with the freedom wherewith Christ hath made men free." There the weak found support against the strong. There the oppressor met men armed with "the sword of the spirit which is the word of God," who compelled him to adopt the eternal principles of justice and truth, and the golden maxim "live and let live" which is nature's first law.

It has been well and truly said that "no men have ever showed less terror of the strongest, less weak complaisance towards power, than the Monks. Amidst the peace and obedience of the cloister they tempered their hearts every day, as indomitable champions of right and truth, for the war against injustice." The Monks brought their civilizing influence into the halls of the nation's legislature, into the Castle of the feudal lord, into the humble home of the serf, and by their unceasing efforts infused into peer and peasant a civil and religious idealism which is the glory of mediæval times.

But the most divine of all lessons taught by the Monks, and the one that went farthest in the saving of social society, was their devotion to the poor. For it must be remembered that society does not solely consist in the few, who are rich, but in the many, and they are the poor. The Redeemer of the world tenderly loved the poor. He most strenuously inculcated the duty of relieving the necessitous. The love of one's neighbour was ranked with the love of God. He even identified Himself with the poor.

"I was hungry and you gave me to eat; thirsty and you gave me to drink; naked and you clothed me." Then shall the Just answer Him saying: "Lord, when did we see thee hungry, and fed thee, thirsty, and gave thee drink, and when did we see thee a stranger and took thee in? ... Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren you did it to me." [1] No hungry or thirsty man was ever refused food and drink at the door of a Monastery; no stranger was ever refused shelter. Every religious house had its almoner, whose duty it was to wait on on the poor, to give them food and lodging when necessary. And this they did in a spirit of profound piety seeing their Saviour in the poor, and serving them as they would serve Him. The Monks have been known to share their last crust with the poor, and, when hard pressed, to part with the Church plate to relieve the pressing necessities of the people. This spirit of Monastic charity is beautifully expressed in the address of Abbot Thieffroy to his Monks: "It matters not that our Churches rise to heaven, that the capitals of their pillars are sculptured and gilded, that our parchment is tinted purple, that gold is melted to form the letters of our manuscripts, and that their bindings are set with precious stones, if we have little or no care for the members of Christ, and if Christ Himself lies naked and bleeding at our doors." Hence the Monks had the care of hospitals, orphanages, and asylums for the poor and the afflicted. The laity regarded the Monks as "the infirmarians of the poor," and made them their almoners. Thus it was that Earl Randal Blundeville gave certain endowments to the Abbey of St. Werburgh for the

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1—Matthew xxv., 35.

support of the leper hospital at Boughton, which was dedicated to St. Giles. And so it was that the Monks endowed the poor with the purified wealth of the rich, and became the intermediary agents, delicate and indefatigable, from whose hands the alms once bestowed by the rich descended in perpetuity upon the poor. Old Chester was rich in these monuments of charity. The name, Spital Boughton, perpetuates the memory of St. Giles' Hospital. Outside the "Northgate" stood St. John's Home for "the sustentation of poor and silly persons." St. Ursula's hospital in Commonhall Lane was for the better-class poor, widows of Aldermen and others. In all these institutions there was daily Mass and other religious exercises. In St. Ursula's they recited the office of our Lady and the De Profundis every day.

But the Monks did more than relieve the wants of the poor. They ennobled the poor. They took from poverty the taint of degradation. The Monks themselves were poor individually and by choice. The highest in the land gloried in being poor Monks. The son of a prince was on the same level in the Monastery as the son of a peasant. The former would not hesitate to clean the shoes of the latter if it were a duty delegated to him. "In Monasteries," writes an old chronicler, "one saw Counts cooking in the kitchen, and Margraves leading the pigs out to feed." No work is menial in a Monastery because all is done for God.

> "Who sweeps a house as for the Lord
> Makes that and the action fine."

When Hugh Lupus, Earl of Chester, became a

Monk in the Abbey, he wore the same kind of habit, eat the same kind of food, slept on the same kind of bed as every other brother. All this had a refining and elevating influence on the poor man. It made him feel that poverty was no crime. It taught him that in the Monastery, at any rate, the Fatherhood of God, and the Brotherhood of man were no mere clap-trap phrases but something that was really recognised and fully realised. When the poor man saw the shepherd-boy, Nicholas Breakespeare, being educated by the Monks, and then become a Monk, and in course of time a priest, an abbot, a bishop, a cardinal, and, finally, a pope, the highest honour on earth, it made him recognise that he was no mere serf, no inferior being, but a man and a Christian with the highest offices open to him if he proved himself worthy of them, and the Monks were the men to give him every encouragement.

In the next lecture we shall see how it came about that religion, learning, and the poor were deprived of their noblest and best benefactors, when we review the dissolution of the Monasteries and the expulsion of the Monks. Dr. Johnson, though not a Catholic, understood and acknowledged the benefits the Monks bestowed on the Christian Church and the human family, and gave expression to his appreciation of them in the well-known words: "I never read of a hermit but in imagination I kiss his feet, and never of a Monastery but I fall down on my knees and kiss the pavement."

LECTURE IV.

Downfall of the Monks.

"They shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for my sake."—
Matthew v., 11.

IN the olden times there were four Monasteries of Monks in Chester, viz.: The Benedictines, the Franciscans, the Dominicans, and the Carmelites. Of three of these not a stone is left upon a stone. The names alone of the Grey, Black, and White Friars are all that can be seen in Chester to-day. Of the fourth—St. Werburgh's—there remain the Church, Cloisters, Chapter-room, and Refectory. The rest of the noble pile is in ruins or levelled to the ground. For well-nigh four centuries no Black Monks have trod those cloisters, no Divine Office has been chanted in the Choir, no High Mass sung at the Great Altar, no procession of the poor has daily approached the Abbey Gates. Gone are the Monasteries of old Chester! Gone are the Monks! Gone is the beautiful Catholic liturgy! Gone is the stream of Charity which flowed unceasingly from the hospitable doors of these holy houses! And to-night

I am to tell you the sad, sad tale of their departure, the downfall of the Monks.

By an Act of Parliament passed in 1536—the 27th of Henry VIII, c. 28—three hundred and seventy-six Monasteries were swept away. Two years later two hundred and seven Monasteries of the Friars were seized. And two years later again—31st Henry VIII. c. 13—another Act was passed by force of which every Monastery in England was dissolved; in all, including Nunneries, about eight hundred, containing nine or ten thousand religious.

How came it that this great army of the Lord was banished from the land? How did it happen that in a Catholic country, for England had not yet opened her doors to the new religion that was being concocted in Germany, nor were there any infidels in the country as there are, for example, in France to-day, how did it happen that all the Monks, Friars, and Nuns were expelled from their peaceful, happy homes, where they lived holy and useful lives? It was practically the work of one man, King Henry VIII., of unholy memory.

Henry VIII. was a man of scruples—of a certain kind of scruples. Having been married to Catherine of Aragon close on twenty years, who had proved a faithful and saintly wife, and by whom he had several children, Henry got into his head that he ought never to have married her. She had been espoused to his brother Arthur who died shortly after, and the marriage was never consummated. When Henry sought the hand of Catherine the question of her marriage with Arthur was discussed, and the

necessary dispensation granted by the Holy See. Henry and Catherine lived happily as man and wife for many a long year. The King was a staunch Catholic and a pious man. He was present at the Holy Sacrifice of the altar every morning, and sometimes assisted at several Masses. He was handsome, good-natured, fond of all manly sports, and able to hold his own with the best athlete in the land. He was learned and clever, and before the death of his brother he had a strong leaning to the sacred ministry. He wrote a book on the Seven Sacraments against Luther. A copy was presented to the Pope, who praised Henry for his zeal, and gave him the title "Defensor Fidei"—defender of the faith—a title which is engraved on every English coin ever since.

On an evil day for Henry and Catherine, for the Catholic faith and for England, for the Monks and the Monasteries, Henry fell in love with a fascinating young Court lady named Anne Boleyn. Passion obtained complete mastery over him. For three years Anne was his mistress, and at last he determined on marrying her. Then it was that Henry began to scruple about his marriage with Catherine. He asked the Pope to grant him a divorce, and to declare his marriage with Catherine null.

The Pope said he could not do it, as it was against the direct teaching of Jesus Christ. "What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder."[1] Henry broke off with Rome, made himself head of the Church in England, married Anne Boleyn, and cast his lawful wife aside.

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1 – Matthew xiv., 1.

Soon after Henry suspected Anne Boleyn of being unfaithful to him, and he cut her head off. The day before Anne's execution the King married Jane Seymour. After Jane's death he married Anne of Cleves, a very ugly woman, and immediately divorced her. Then he married Catherine Howard and chopped her head off. Finally he married Catherine Parr, who survived him.

At the time that Henry was marrying and murdering women he had another scruple. He thought the Monks were not as good as they ought to be, and that it was his duty as pope of England to reform them. Just imagine Henry VIII. reforming the Monks! An adulterer, a bigamist, a murderer, a sacriligious robber, a schismatic, pretending to reform the servants of God. Will any sane person believe that Henry was uneasy about the morals of the Monks? Is it not as clear as daylight that he must have had other motives than zeal for Monastic discipline in meddling with the Monasteries and their inmates? And history gives us two. First of all the Monks were very loyal to the old faith, and strongly opposed to Henry's divorce, and the breach with the Apostolic See. Secondly, their possessions were a great temptation to a monarch who was exceedingly extravagant, and whose exchequer was very low. If Henry could get rid of the Monks he could far more easily indulge in iniquity, and their property would replenish his purse. Hemingway truly observes that "it was obvious that so long as the Monastic establishments remained, the influence of the Romish Church would be sufficiently powerful to thwart the inclinations of the monarch."[1] A high

1—History of Chester, p. 196.

compliment to the Monks. And Dr. Morris declares that "the real motive" for banishing the Monks and plundering the Monasteries was "the replenishing of the King's autocratic purse."[1]

Let us see how strikingly the facts of history bear out these statements. The Monks were not "dumb dogs." They were not sentinels who had gone to sleep. They were men of principle, men who felt it their duty to admonish the first man in the land when he flagrantly violated the laws of God as they would the last man. An intrepid Monk of the Gospel times, John the Baptist, reproached King Herod for his incest, and did so at the cost of his life. And so also the Monks of the sixteenth century fearlessly reprimanded King Henry VIII. for his unchristian conduct. When Henry went to Mass at the Franciscan Church close to the gates of the royal palace at Greenwich on Passion Sunday, one of the Monks—Father Peto—went into the pulpit and rebuked him, and threatened him with Achab's punishment, that the dogs would lick his blood if he continued his sinful career, which really happened at Henry's funeral.

Father Peto's words are worth quoting. Taking his text from the third Book of Kings, twenty-first chapter and nineteenth verse: "In this place, wherein the dogs licked the blood of Naboth, they shall lick thy blood also." Father Peto, in the course of his sermon, seemed to be fired with the zeal of a prophet, and passionately cried out: "I am that Micheas whom thou wilt hate, because I must

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1—Chester in the Plantagenet and Tudor Period, p. 149.

tell thee truly that this marriage is unlawful. I know that I shall eat the bread of affliction and drink the water of sorrow, yet because our Lord hath put it into my mouth, I must speak it. There are many other preachers, yea, too many, who preach and persuade thee otherwise, feeding thy folly and frail affection upon hope of their own worldly promotion, and by that means betraying thy soul, thy honour, and thy posterity, to obtain fat benefices, to become rich abbots, and get episcopal jurisdiction and other ecclesiastical dignities. These, I say, are the four-hundred prophets, who, in the spirit of lying, seek to deceive thee. But take good heed, lest, being seduced, thou find Achab's punishment, and have thy blood licked up by the dogs."

The King must have felt the reprimand very keenly, but he said nothing. The next Sunday, however, he brought one of his sychophants, a Dr. Curran, to preach in the same pulpit. Curran warmly defended the King, and abused the Monks, taunting them with cowardice as Father Peto had gone to Canterbury on business. There was a Father Elstow listening to the sermon on the rood-loft, and when he heard the jibes of Curran he answered him and ardently defended his brother-Monk and the Catholic cause. "Good sir," said he, "Father Peto is gone to a Provincial Council, at Canterbury, and not fled from fear, for to-morrow he will return. Meanwhile, I am here as another Micheas, and I will lay down my life to prove the truth of all that Peto has taught out of the Holy Scripture." The King was furious, and sent word to Father Elstow that he would put him in a sack and fling him into the Thames, which flowed hard by. The Friar

replied, with the playfulness of a child: "Tell his Majesty to threaten these things to rich and dainty folk; as for me it matters not whether I go to heaven by land or by water."

With opposition of this kind it is easy to understand why Henry felt he must get rid of the Monks at any cost. He began with his strongest opponents, the Franciscans. He had two hundred of them cast into dungeons, where fifty of them died of ill-treatment. The Provincial, Father John Forest, was roasted alive at Smithfield, and the Superiors of Canterbury and Richmond were hanged, drawn, and quartered at Tyburn.

The second motive for expelling the Monks was avarice. The royal exchequer was very low. Henry lived in a most extravagant manner. He soon squandered the large savings of his father. And the Continental wars almost emptied his purse, and left the finances of the nation in a very critical state. Now the property of the obnoxious Monks would be a great boon. He had already terrified the bishops and clergy, and obtained large sums of money from them under one pretext or another. It was not so easy to frighten the Monks, and the only way of seizing their possessions was to blacken their character, and to get Parliament to expel them.

We have clear historical evidence to show how the King accomplished his designs. A Commission was appointed, with the notorious Thomas Cromwell at the head, to enquire into the morals of the Monks. Visitors or agents were sent around to the Monasteries. Now listen to the way they set about reforming the

Monks. All Monks under twenty-four years of age were to be compelled to leave. Those above that age were to be encouraged to give up Monastic life. Those who left were not to wear the religious habit but the dress of a secular priest, and they were to receive the sum of forty shillings from the Abbot or other local superior. Worse than this, the Monks were to be asked to renounce the Pope and acknowledge the King as head of the Church in England. Moreover the Monks were to deliver over to the King's agents all the precious ornaments of the Church, and whatever else could be converted into cash.[1] But worse than all, the visitors were to trump up crimes of the grossest character against the Monks. This is really so diabolical that if it were anyone else but Henry VIII. and Thomas Cromwell one would be slow in accepting it. But it is a stern fact. Dr. Lingard, a most broad-minded historian, quoting an old writer, says: "The most abominable crimes were to be charged upon the religious, and the charge was to be managed with the utmost industry, boldness, and dexterity."[2]

The Visitors did their work well, and as their masters desired. They presented a report called afterwards the "Black Book." This report is a mysterious document. Nobody seems to have actually seen it, but Cromwell and the King, and no one has seen it since. The King is supposed to have conveyed the contents of it to Parliament. At any rate he told the "House" what he wanted to tell, that the

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1—Sanders "Anglican Schism," p. 130. Gasquet, Henry VIII. and the English Monasteries, vol. 1., p. 247.

2—Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church, p. 245, note.

Monks were very naughty, that they did not fast and pray half enough in the small Monasteries, and asked that a "Bill" be passed suppressing them and sending the members to large Monasteries "wherein, thanks be to God, religion is right-well kept and observed."

Parliament did not at all take kindly to the suppressing of the Monasteries, even the small ones. They were suspicious of the King notwithstanding his cunning pretence of sending the Monks of small Monasteries to large ones, where "religion was right-well kept and observed." Days went by and the "Bill" seemed unlikely to pass. At last the King summoned to him those members who were known to be strongly opposed to it, and said: "I hear that my "Bill" will not pass, but I will have it pass, or I will have some of your heads."[1] And they had good reason to think that he meant it. Had they not seen the heads of More and Fisher, and of other good and great men who did not fall in with the King's wishes, roll on the block. The "Bill" passed, but the "Commons" stipulated that the Monks who were turned out should be suitably provided for, that their property should be used for the public good, and that the poor should not be deprived of their patrimony. All the Monasteries of an income not exceeding two hundred pounds a year, and where there were not more than twelve Monks, were suppressed, and the King and his agents divided the spoils between them, and fine squabbling they had over the property of the poor Monks. It was the thin end of the wedge. It was like the taste of

1—Spelman, "History of Sacrilege," p. 10. Gasquet, "Henry VIII. and the English Monasteries," vol. 1, p. 311.

human blood to a tiger. It created an appetite for more. The large Monasteries were now attacked. The Monks were worried with the oath of supremacy, and the vexatious visits of the agents. The King and Cromwell actually had spies in some of the Monasteries in order to get hold of something against the Monks. At Greenwich there was a traitorous lay-brother—Richard Lyst—who kept Henry informed of the movements of the Friars, and the King sent him dainties from his own table, and afterwards gave him a position at Cambridge.[1] Many of the Monks left the country. Some went to Ireland, others to the Continent. Soon another "Act" was passed sweeping away the remainder of the Monasteries, and giving all the property to the King and his heirs for ever.[2]

Now there are two important points which must be touched on. First, what is the fact, what is the truth about the morals of the Monks? All trustworthy evidence shows that the Monks of the sixteenth century, as a body, were holy and hard working men, men who did untold good for the people among whom they lived. I do not say that there were no bad Monks. I candidly admit that there were individuals here and there who had fallen from the high pedestal of the spirit and the letter of Monasticism, Monks who were unworthy of the habit which they wore. But I maintain that these were exceptions and proved the rule. So unusual a thing was it, and so unexpected, to see a Monk who was not a model of virtue, that one such would be a nine days' wonder, and would be talked of far and wide.

1—Gasquet, Henry VIII. &c., vol. 1, p. 158. 2—31 Henry VIII., c. 13.

Since Monks are men and not angels, and since in the old days there were thousands of Monks in England, it is not greatly to be wondered at, however much regretted, if there was an occasional black sheep in the flock. There was a Judas among the Apostles. But because of this no reasonable person would say *all* the Apostles were bad. And so it is altogether unfair to blame the body of Monks for the faults of the few. "Ex uno disce omnes"—by one know all—is not good logic.

It is morally impossible considering the life of a Monk, considering his almost constant occupation, his numerous pious exercises, his public prayer seven times a day, his long hours of study, his preaching, and his various works of charity, the safeguards which Monasticism hedges round him, and his living out of the way of a thousand and one temptations which beset the man in the world, I say it is morally impossible that, as a body, the Monks could be corrupt, or could be anything else than a virtuous, a God-fearing, and God-serving society of men.

And though the preamble of the Act of 1536 for the suppression of the small Monasteries details certain vices of the Monks, it must be remembered that this preamble is based on Henry's representations, or, rather, misrepresentations to Parliament. Surely from what we have seen no one can accept charges against the Monks coming from Henry VIII., Cromwell, or their agents. No Judge or Jury in the world with a particle of Justice in them would accept these as witnesses against anyone. The words of Edmund Burke on the French Revolution are applicable here: "I rather suspect that vices are feigned or exaggerated

when profit is looked for in the punishment. An enemy is a bad witness, a robber is worse." Henry and Cromwell and the "Visitors" of the Monasteries were enemies and robbers of the Monks, and therefore their evidence cannot be accepted. As a matter of fact even in the preamble there is nothing but general accusations. There is no specific charge against any particular Monastery, or any one Monk. Notwithstanding all the arts used to trump up crimes against the Monks, writes Hearne, "the proofs were so insufficient, that, from what I have been able to gather, I have not found any direct one against any single Monastery."[1] Did not the King himself admit that in the large Monasteries "religion was right-well kept and observed"? And surely there is as much reason, if not more, to think it was also kept and observed in the small Monasteries. Did not Henry in 1513 write to the Pope and say that he had the deepest affection for the Franciscan Friars at Greenwich, the very Monks whom he first attacked. He praises their holiness and regrets that he cannot find words to describe their merits as they deserve. "They present an ideal of Christian poverty, sincerity, and charity; their lives are devoted to fasting, watching, and praying; and they are occupied in hard toil by night and by day to win sinners back to God."[2] This was before he met Anne Boleyn, and before these same Friars reproached him for usurping the office of Pope, and for putting away his lawful wife.

It is true the Church in England in the sixteenth

1—Lingard, Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church, p. 245.

2—Gasquet, "Henry VIII. and the English Monasteries." vol. 1., p. 156.

century was not at high-water mark. The plagues of the fourteenth century—the Black Death and the sweating sickness which wrought such havoc in Chester as elsewhere—and the thirty-five years civil war in the fifteenth century,[1] left much to be desired. Historians tell us that "there existed such distress and such a universal loosening of the bonds of society as is only to be found in the description of earthquakes in South America; whole villages died out, cities shrunk within their walls, the houses becoming unoccupied fell into ruins. The flocks perished, the land fell out of cultivation, the crops rotted in the ground for there were no harvest-men to reap them, and the country had not recovered from the effects by the sixteenth century."[2] Two-thirds of the priests died during the "Black Death," and the Monks were largely represented among the clerical victims. Their numbers became reduced in the same proportion as the population, and the high standard of learning and usefulness was brought down in like manner through fewness of priests. But withal, as even Anglican Divines, like Maitland[3] and Jessop[4] admit, "the Monks were in all times and places better than their age."

The second point is: How did the nation take the spoliation of the Monasteries and the persecution of the Monks? Very badly indeed. The people were shocked at the King's divorce. They were horrified when they saw him marry and murder wives at his pleasure. They were perplexed when they saw the bench of bishops, with one exception, acknow-

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1—1452-1487. 2—c. Gasquet, ili., vol. 1. p. 6.
3—"Dark Ages," p. 8. 4—"Coming of the Friars," p. 159.

ledge Henry as head of the Church of England, with the elusive saving clause, "as far as the law of God permits." They were pained when they saw the King send the Monks adrift, Monks who were their own flesh and blood, for very few of them were not Englishmen. They were amazed when they saw Henry seize the Monasteries and the possessions of the Monks, and disgusted when they beheld all the revenues of an abbey given to a woman who made a pudding to please his palate. The people must have thought the end of the world was at hand. But gradually the awful truth dawned on them. They began to realize that the old faith was overthrown, that their sons and daughters were turned out of the Monasteries and Convents, and, what was infinitely far more painful to them, expelled with the taint of immorality on them, and that the poor were being robbed of their patrimony. The whole truth flashed on them with awful vividness. They awoke as from some hideous nightmare. Their Catholic instincts roused the nation to action. The people rose in rebellion. The "Pilgrimage of Grace" marched through the land, "the object of which," writes Fenwick,[1] "was obviously the restoration of the Monks and nuns, and to stop the spoliation of the Churches." Thousands and tens of thousands of stalwart men, led by the true nobility of the country, the best blood of England, enrolled themselves beneath the sacred banner of faith and freedom, which bore the image of the Sacred Host and of the Five Wounds of Jesus. As they swept along like an avenging host the Monks were restored to the Monasteries, and the old worship was revived,

1—"History of Chester," p. 168.

with all its former splendour, in the Abbey Churches. The King was alarmed on hearing of the success of the insurgents. The Throne itself seemed in danger. He despatched the Duke of Norfolk to quell them. Norfolk feared to meet the insurgents in battle. Instead, he arranged a meeting with the leaders. They demanded a restoration of the Monks, the punishment of the "visitors" of the Monasteries, the removal of the wicked advisers of the King, and full freedom for the ancient faith. Norfolk pledged his word that all their grievances would be remedied in a Parliament to be held immediately at York, on condition of their laying down their arms and disbanding. They innocently and foolishly did so. And immediately the defenceless insurgents were literally slaughtered, and even people who took no part whatever in the insurrection were most wantonly punished. The King's pleasure was carried out to the letter. "Before you close up your banners again you shall cause such dreadful execution to be done upon a good number of the inhabitants of every town, village, and hamlet that have offended us, that there may be a fearful spectacle to all others hereafter that would practice any like manner."[2] One or two other risings ended in similar disaster. The cause of the Monks was lost, and at the same time was lost the cause of Christ's Church in England.

The 15th August, 1539, and the 16th July, 1541, were black letter days in the dear old City of Chester. On the former date the Grey, Black, and White Friars were turned out of their Monasteries. On the latter date the Black Monks were expelled from the Abbey. It is easy to imagine the grief of these

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2—Tannton, "English Black Monks," vol. I., p. 156.

Monks and Friars at leaving their abodes of peace and prayer, the sacred shrines where they spent many happy years. Tears must have welled into their eyes as they saw their beloved books sold for a trifle, and the sacred vessels being carried off to be melted down and poured into the King's coffers, and into the pockets of his unscrupulous agents. But they had one consolation, no citizen of Chester could be found to touch their property. The houses and grounds of the Friars were bought for a few pounds by a Londoner named Coke. And it was years before a Cestrian—Foulk Dutton—possessed a sod of Monastic soil.

They were two sad days also for the citizens. They must have crowded the Monastic Churches at the last services, and with sobbing voices and heaving hearts joined in the sacred liturgy. And as the last tones of the Divine Office died away in the vaulted roofs, and the lights disappeared one by one, the people felt that there was now a void which could never be filled, because the Monks and the Monasteries with their beautiful services, their frequent means of grace, their hospitality to strangers, and their loving care for the needy and the poor, had passed away like an early morning dream, and, as an old chronicler writes, "were gone for ever."

Gone, indeed, but not for ever. Monasticism seems to be indigenous to the soil of Chester. Thank God, there are Monks in the ancient city to-day, sons of St. Francis, successors of the Grey Friars. And surely it is no idle dream, no foolish fancy to hope that the day will come when the Benedictines shall build up again the Abbey foundations and possess their Abbey Church, and the Black and White Friars shall dwell on their ancient sites, and bestow blessings all around them, as did those grand old heroes of God, those noble benefactors of humanity—THE MONKS OF OLD CHESTER.